

Digestive Problems

By D. Scott Adams

The number of potential problems in the digestive system is extremely large, but because of space limitations this chapter must be limited.

Colibacillosis is a disease of young lambs and kids which is manifest as diarrhea (loose stool, scours) in newborns and an infection of the blood in animals 2 to 6 weeks of age. The cause is certain strains of *Escherichia coli* (a bacterium or germ), which is the most common organism found in the intestinal tract of animals.

Lambs and kids 1 to 4 days of age develop diarrhea with a yellow or gray color which contains more water as the disease becomes worse.

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Death occurs in 24 to 48 hours in many cases. In the other form of the disease, lambs and kids 2 to 6 weeks of age develop high fevers and may become dull, unable to see, incoordinate, unable to rise, and they may die.

The bacterium that causes it is shed in the stool and lasts for extended periods in the environment.

Lambs and kids of sufficient value should be treated under the supervision of a veterinarian. Fluids and appropriate antibacterial drugs are given.

Lambing and kidding on areas known to be seeded with the bacteria should be avoided if possible. If it is not, then areas should be thoroughly cleaned with disinfectant solutions, and ample clean bedding supplied. Contact between sick and well animals should be minimized.

Salmonellosis. This widespread disease of all ages of

sheep and goats often is precipitated by stress. The cause is *Salmonella* spp., a genus of bacteria.

Signs are diarrhea, depression and fever. Blood often is seen in stools.

Infected animals shed the bacteria in their feces, which are consumed by others in contaminated feedstuffs. Certain *Salmonella* spp. can infect humans. Professional advice should be sought.

To treat animals, fluids and antibacterial drugs should be given under the direction of a veterinarian.

For prevention, use good sanitation procedures. Clean and disinfect contaminated pens, with several weeks of drying. Control rats, mice and birds which can carry the bacteria.

Enterotoxemia is a group of diseases caused by toxins of three different bacteria which inhabit the intestinal tract: Yellow lamb disease, hemorrhagic (bloody) enterotoxemia, and overeating disease (pulpy kidney).

Causes—yellow lamb disease is caused by *Clostridium perfringens* type A, hemorrhagic enterotoxemia by *Clostridium perfringens* type C, and overeating disease by *Clostridium perfringens* type D.

Signs—sudden death of previously healthy lambs and kids. Yellow lamb disease: Yellow lining of mouth and whites of eyes, fever, and red urine. Hemorrhagic enterotoxemia: Loose bloody stool. Overeating disease: The most common form occurs in lambs or kids, feeders (mostly), and adult goats in a more prolonged disease.

Acquired While Eating

The organisms persist in the soil and are acquired during eating.

There usually is no treatment, but antibiotics and antitoxins may be helpful. Consult your veterinarian.

Prevention—vaccination and dietary changes under direction of your veterinarian.

Parasitic Gastroenteritis is a very large category of disease caused by worms and single celled organisms which live in the stomach and intestines of sheep and goats and cause disease there.

Causes—stomach worms and worms of the small and large intestines; coccidia (single celled organisms) which infect the small and large intestines.

Signs are diarrhea, slow weight gains, poor hair coat, weight loss, anemia (thin blood) and death in severe

cases. Bloody diarrhea and depression occur with coccidiosis.

Eggs of these organisms are shed in the feces and consumed as animals feed.

The most effective drugs for parasitic gastroenteritis of sheep and goats must be prescribed by a veterinarian.

Advice from your veterinarian is recommended so that a specific diagnosis, treatment and preventive program can be instituted. Regular checks for worms in fecal samples is a good way of determining the need for preventive drug therapy.

Bloat. This is a condition which results from accumulation of gas and frothy (foamy) material in the first stomach of the sheep or goat, and may result in rapid death because of pressure on the lungs.

The cause is lush legume (alfalfa, clover) pastures which produce froth, and objects like apples and potatoes. Signs are difficult breathing, lying down, and the left upper side of the animal may be greatly enlarged. This is not an infectious disease.

For treatment call your veterinarian. Mixtures of various detergents can be given orally and/or by insertion of a stomach tube by a qualified individual. Puncture of the first stomach under advice of a veterinarian should be attempted only in the most desperate situations.

Prevention—animals should be allowed only cautious access to legume pastures. Consult your veterinarian for advice on types of detergents which may be added to salt.